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## CHARLES McBURNEY

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**D**URING the decade from 1890 to 1900—the height of his professional career—Dr. Charles McBurney held rank as one of the greatest if not the leading figure in American Surgery. His workshop, the Syms Amphitheater of the Roosevelt Hospital, planned by him and built under his direction, was at that time one of the finest surgical amphitheaters in America, and a Mecca for American as well as foreign surgeons. His work typified the highest development of aseptic surgical technique, then still in its infancy.

Dr. McBurney was born February 17, 1845, in Roxbury, now a part of Boston, Massachusetts. His father, of Scotch-Irish birth and parentage, came to this country as a boy, and followed a manufacturing and commercial career. His mother, Rosine Horton, was of New England stock, her ancestors being among the oldest families of Maine and Massachusetts.

Dr. McBurney received his preparatory education in the Roxbury Latin School, and in a private school in Boston.

In 1862 he entered Harvard University, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1866 and Master of Arts in 1869. In 1870 he was graduated in Medicine from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York.

After a surgical internship of 18 months in Bellevue Hospital, he went abroad, pursuing his studies in surgery and surgical specialties in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and London. In 1873 he began practice in New York, and a year later became associated with Dr. George A. Peters, a connection which lasted until Dr. Peters retired from practice 10 years later.

His teaching positions were exclusively with his alma mater, and in the period from 1873 to 1894 were successively, assistant demonstrator of anatomy under Dr. Henry B. Sands, demonstrator of anatomy, lecturer on the anatomy of nerves (1878–1880), lecturer on operative surgery (1882–1889), professor of surgery (1889–1894), professor of clinical surgery (1894–1900). He was appointed attending surgeon to St. Luke's Hospital in 1875, to Bellevue Hospital in 1880, and in 1888 as successor to Dr. Sands was placed in charge of the entire surgical service of the Roosevelt Hospital, a position which he held until 1900, and which during that period was perhaps the most notable surgical service in this country.

He held at various times the position of consulting surgeon to the New York Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital, the Presbyterian Hospital, the Hospital for Ruptured and Crippled, the Orthopedic Hospital, and St. Mark's Hospital.

He was a member of the New York Surgical Society, the New York Academy of Medicine, the Medical and Surgical Society, the Practitioners Society, and the

Roman Medical Society. In Europe he held a fellowship in the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, Scotland; he was also a corresponding member of the Societe de Chirurgie of Paris and an honorary member of the Medical Society of Constantinople.

He devised several new procedures in surgical work and his contributions to surgical literature were many and important. The most notable, perhaps, were connected with the subject of appendicitis.

His paper entitled "Experience with Early Operative Interference in Cases of Disease of the Vermiform Appendix," published in the *New York Medical Journal*, December 21, 1889, in which he emphasized the importance of localized tenderness at "McBurney's point," was a classic, and a designation of the outstanding physical sign of the disease in its early stages, which will always be associated with his name, as will the intermuscular incision which he also introduced (in 1894), the "McBurney incision." In the next few years five or six other important articles on appendicitis from his pen appeared in medical journals or in surgical textbooks.

His attempt to devise an operation for the radical cure of hernia was not so successful, but was an evidence of his activity in seeking to improve the surgical procedures of his time. Other important contributions to surgical literature, some of them introducing new procedures were:

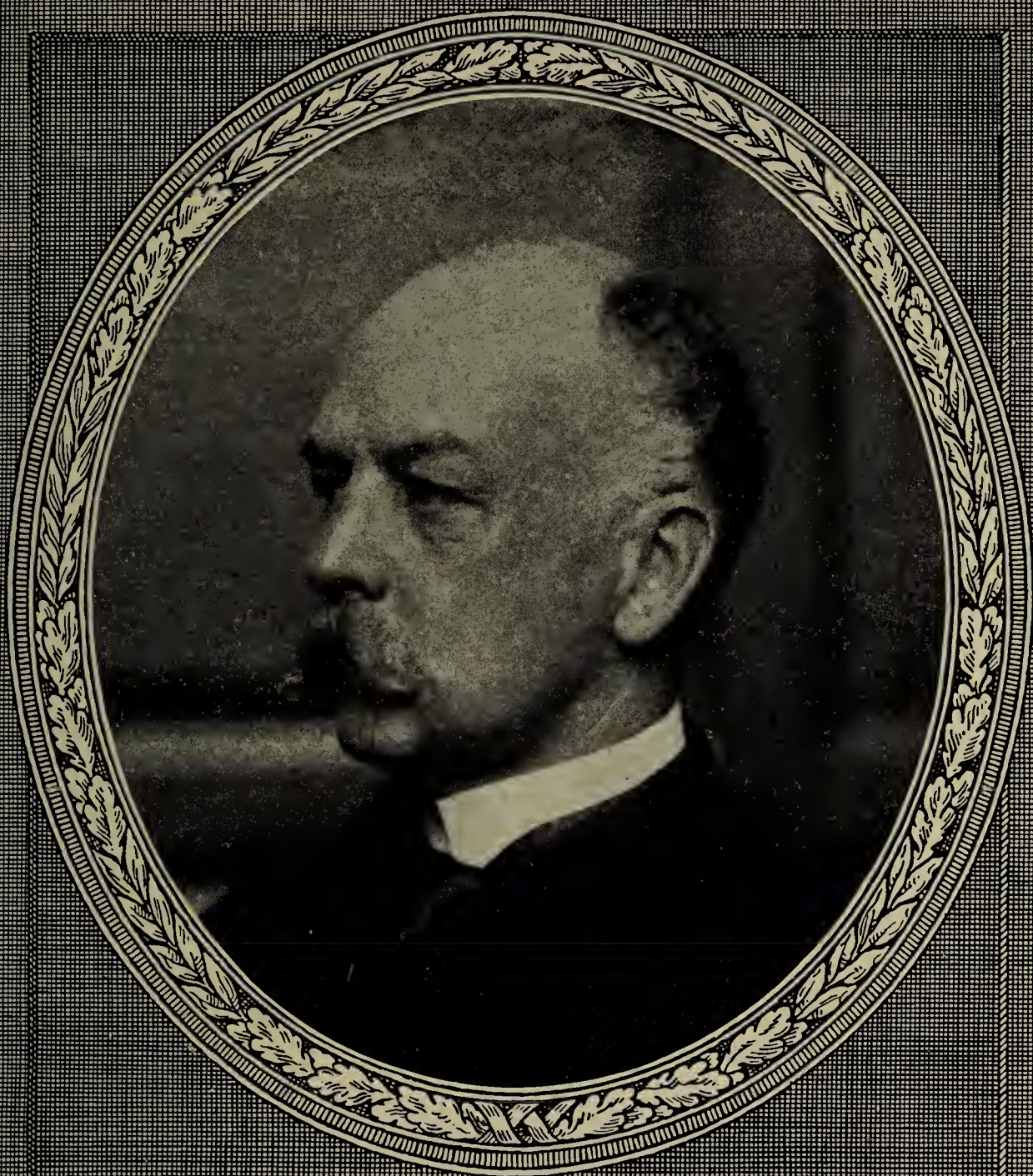
"Dislocation of the Humerus Complicated by Fracture at or near the Surgical Neck, with a New Method of Reduction," *Annals of Surgery*, April 1894; "Removal of Biliary Calculi by the Duodenal Route (a new Operation)," *Annals of Surgery*, 1898; "The Use of Rubber Gloves in Operative Surgery," *Annals of Surgery*, July, 1898; "Remarks Concerning the Practice of Aseptic Surgery," *New York Medical Journal*, March 22, 1902; "The Technique of Aseptic Surgery," *International Text Book of Surgery*.

He was one of the early and consistent advocates of the use of rubber gloves, and his teaching did much to make their adoption universal.

His increasing and extensive private practice necessitated his relinquishing the chair of surgery at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1894, but he continued as professor of clinical surgery until he gave up active hospital work.

He was called as consultant to the bedside of President McKinley a few days before his death.

Although a good student of his specialty, Dr. McBurney was not a scientist in the restricted use of the term, but shone by his strong common-sense in his attitude toward his patients. He could not have been called a "brilliant" operator, but his lack of hesitation, founded on the care with which he planned every operation and the thoroughness with which he completed each step before passing to the next, resulted in a great saving of time and left the spectator with the profound impression that he had seen a "Master of his Art" at work. Bold, yet a great respector of tissues, the finished result of his operations left little to be desired.



CHARLES MCBURNEY  
1845-1913



Dr. McBurney was a true sportsman and fond of out-door life. He was an expert shot and salmon fisher. All his life he took a great deal of out-of-doors exercise. During his interneship at Bellevue, he rowed almost daily on the East River in a single shell and up to the end of his life was an ardent devotee to golf.

His last years were saddened by ill health which drove him into retirement in 1905, nine years before his death.

His career marks a brilliant epoch in the development of American surgery and his name will go down to posterity as one of the strongest and ablest men, who have helped to bring it to the forefront as it stands today.

